

**Robert Schuman Centre  
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EU Concerns in Estonia and Latvia:  
Implications of Enlargement  
for Russia's Behaviour  
Towards the Russian-speaking Minorities

JEKATERINA DORODNOVA

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## INTRODUCTION\*

In view of the Baltic countries' anticipated accession to the European Union (EU), the present study attempts to highlight the reasons for the EU's involvement with the problems of the Russian-speaking<sup>1</sup> minorities in Estonia and Latvia. It analyses the frequently expressed concern of Western observers over the possible deterioration of Estonian-Russian, Latvian-Russian, and consequently, EU-Russian relations in the case of EU enlargement to the Baltic states considering the controversial Estonian and Latvian policies towards their Russian-speakers and Russia's harsh reactions to them. The fundamental questions to be answered in this work are the following: why does the European Union actively condition the membership of Estonia and Latvia in the EU upon the integration of the Russian-speaking minorities into Estonian and Latvian societies? What implications will the EU's enlargement into Estonia and Latvia have upon Russia's behaviour towards the Russian-speaking minorities residing there?

The study consists of four sections. Section one generally outlines the EU and the overall international interference with the issues related to the position of the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia and establishes the main concerns of the international community in this area. The paper proceeds to examine the geopolitical dimension of the continuing EU involvement with the issue of minorities in the two countries; namely, the concern for the suspected Russia's aspirations to use the Russian-speakers for exercising pressure on Estonia and Latvia, thus threatening the security of the enlarged Union. Section three provides an overview of the evolution of the confrontational Estonian and Latvian relations with Russia in order to establish the reasons behind the stances held by the actors in the dispute and examine the degree of potential danger behind Russia's rhetoric concerning the Russian-speakers. Finally, section four attempts to outline the implications of the EU's enlargement into Estonia and Latvia upon Russia's behaviour towards the Russian-speaking minorities in those countries through analysing the possible measures of pressure from the Russian side and the probability of public

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\* This paper is part of the RSC Research Project: "The Eastward Enlargement of the European Union: the Case of the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania". I would like to thank Nils Muiznieks for his valuable comments on the draft of this paper. The text was last revised in July 1999

<sup>1</sup> The category of "Russian-speakers" includes all those who regard Russian as their native language or the principal language of communication (mostly Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians, but also many Jews, Poles and representatives of other ethnic groups). This term, although somewhat vague, still appears to be the most appropriate one to describe the above category of people and is most often used in academic literature.



support for possible attempts by Russia to regain influence in the Baltics, using the Russian-speaking minorities to project its interests.

## **1. EU INVOLVEMENT WITH MINORITY ISSUES IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA: CONSIDERATIONS OF DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

The collapse of the communist system in Eastern and Central Europe was met with enthusiasm in the West, and the desire of the new democracies to join the European Union was viewed as legitimate and logical. The accession process of these countries to the EU seems irreversible at this point. However, the enlargement project has confronted the EU with new challenges that have compelled it to apply a strict policy of conditionality in its relations with the applicant states. Thus, the 1993 Copenhagen European Council required the associated countries to ensure, among other things, "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".<sup>2</sup>

In the Estonian and Latvian cases, the EU (as well as other influential international organisations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the UN and others) has mostly been concerned with the problem of statelessness that emerged in the two countries due to the decision taken by their governments to base their citizenship policies upon the principle of legal continuity of the pre-WWII Estonian and Latvian Republics. Upon the restoration of their independence in 1991, both countries granted citizenship only to those persons who were citizens before 1940 (year of annexation of Estonia and Latvia by the USSR), and to their direct descendants.<sup>3</sup> The Russian-speaking communities, most of which were formed in Estonia and Latvia during the post-WWII years as a result of large-scale in-migration from other Soviet republics, were, thus, rendered stateless. In this way, initially about one third of the population of each country who, from the point of view of the policy-makers represented the consequences of the illegal Soviet annexation of the Baltics, were excluded from the citizenry. Today, about 27% of Latvia's population are stateless.<sup>4</sup> In

<sup>2</sup> Commission of the European Communities, *The Europe Agreements and Beyond: A Strategy to Prepare the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe for Accession. Communication from the Commission to the Council*, COM(94) 361 final, Luxembourg, 1994, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Lowell Barrington, "The Domestic and International Consequences of Citizenship in the Soviet Successor States", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 47, no. 5., 1995, 739.

<sup>4</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report for Latvia, 1997*, (Riga: UNDP, 1997), 53; the report of August 1998 gives the figure of 26.5%, ("Human Rights and Social Integration in the Republic of Latvia: A General Survey", *National Report prepared by LR Ministry of Foreign*



Estonia, the figure is approximately 13%; however, there is also a large number of those who opted for the citizenship of the Russian Federation - about 8%.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, the policies chosen by the governments of Estonia and Latvia were supported by a number of convincing arguments. Issues of historical justice, sovereignty, national security and demography collided with considerations of human rights and minority rights. Besides, the Estonian and Latvian cases revealed some shortcomings of international law in the field of nationality. Thus, the approach Estonia and Latvia adopted with respect to their citizenship policies was initially approved of by the UNHCR, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and other international organisations, as this approach was in formal accordance with the norms of international law.<sup>6</sup>

Later, however, it appeared that the naturalisation provisions of the Estonian and, particularly, Latvian citizenship law<sup>7</sup> did not result in a rapid reduction of the number of stateless persons. Rather, there emerged a general discouragement of non-citizens to apply for naturalisation as the procedure was viewed as humiliating and too demanding. The 1998 survey revealed that 33% of non-citizens in Latvia viewed naturalisation is humiliating; 42% doubted their ability to pass the language exam, 40% - to pass the history exam.<sup>8</sup> This problem, aggravated by the Estonian and Latvian nationalising policies in the field of language and education, raised concern on the part of the international community.

The EU took measures to influence the situation by applying its conditionality policy to Estonia and Latvia where membership in the EU is

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*Affairs and LR Naturalisation Board in Association with UNDP for the UNDP Regional Meeting in Yalta 2-4 September 1998 - "Human Rights for Human Development", 10).*

<sup>5</sup>Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Citizenship Statistics", *Estonia Today*. Estonian Foreign Ministry's Fact Sheet, March 19, 1998, <http://www.vm.ee/eng/estoday/1998/03cits.html>.) NOTE: in Estonia, non-citizens have the right to participate in the local elections. However, they cannot run for office.

<sup>6</sup>Françoise Girard, "The Latvian and Estonian Laws on Citizenship and the Problem of Statelessness in International Law", *paper presented at the Third Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities*, New York, April 18, 1998, 10.

<sup>7</sup>The 1994 Latvian Law on Citizenship, established the so-called "window system" of naturalisation allowing only certain age groups to apply for citizenship each year. Those between the age of 16 and 20 could apply in 1996, between 20 and 25 - in 1997 and so on (this applied only to the ones born in Latvia). Those born outside Latvia could start applying only by 2001.

<sup>8</sup>Baltic Data House, *The Programme for Studies and Activities "Towards a Civic Society". Report on the Results of Stages 1 and 2: Focus Group Discussions. Survey of Latvian Inhabitants. November 1997-January 1998* (Riga: Baltic Data House, 1998), figure 23, 40.

regarded as their foreign policy priority. The Commission's Opinion on Latvia's application for membership in the EU stated that:

Latvia needs to take measures to accelerate naturalisation procedures to enable the Russian-speaking non-citizens to become better integrated into Latvian society. It should also pursue its efforts to ensure general equality of treatment for non-citizens and minorities, in particular for access to professions and participation in the democratic process.<sup>9</sup>

Estonia received almost identical recommendations.<sup>10</sup>

Committed to the principles and values of liberal democracy, the EU expects the associated countries to accept them as well, seeing the enlargement as a "major opportunity for Europe to unite under democratic conditions".<sup>11</sup> Thus, the fact that today a significant share of Estonian and Latvian populations still remains excluded from participation in the decision-making process in their countries of residence represents a major concern for the EU, as it poses a challenge to the aspiration of truly democratic political arrangements in these countries.

Ambassador Gunter Weiss of the Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia, sees the integration of the Latvian society as Latvia's top domestic priority.<sup>12</sup> As he points out, the EU strives to "contribute to a better understanding of Latvia's obvious choice for its future: to consolidate the unity of the state and shape a united society in order to avoid internal frictions, and to reintegrate Latvia into the democratic society by its integration into the European community of peoples".<sup>13</sup> Thus, by requiring the Estonian and Latvian governments to accelerate naturalisation, eliminate the problem of statelessness, and take action in order to consolidate their societies, as well as by promoting social harmony by way of, among other things, supporting the

<sup>9</sup> The European Commission. Commission's Opinion on Latvia's Application for Membership of the European Union, July 16, 1997, available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/enlarge/agenda2000\\_en/op\\_latvia/contents.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/enlarge/agenda2000_en/op_latvia/contents.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Commission's Opinion on Estonia is available at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/enlarge/agenda2000\\_en/op\\_estonia/contents.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg1a/enlarge/agenda2000_en/op_estonia/contents.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Fraser Cameron, "The European Union and The Challenge of Enlargement", in: Maresceau, Marc (ed.), *Enlarging the European Union. Relations Between the EU and Central and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 241.

<sup>12</sup> Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia/Latvian Institute of International Affairs, "Building an Inclusive Society for Europe: the Challenge Facing Latvia", *International Conference Report, Riga, Latvia, May 4-5, 1998*, Chief Rapporteur: Nils Muizhnieks, forward by Gunter Weiss and Atis Lejins (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



National Programme for Latvian Language Training, the EU has been reasserting its role as “a major producer of order in the new Europe”<sup>14</sup>.

EU involvement, both direct and facilitated by the efforts of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE and other international actors, has generally led to positive results.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly, it has helped to lift the taboo off the topic of citizenship and minority problems. Throughout 1997-1998, a debate on integration of the Latvian society was launched in the mass media and amendments to the Citizenship Law began to be seriously considered by the political elite. The EU played a major role in the promotion of this debate. As a result of pressure from international organisations on the one hand and Russia on the other, as well as owing to the activities of local NGO's, Latvia introduced amendments to its Citizenship Law abolishing the “windows” system and granting, upon the request of their parents, citizenship to stateless children born in Latvia after independence.<sup>16</sup> The political will to join the EU was the major driving force behind this decision,<sup>17</sup> although the domestic context played a significant role as well. In December 1998, Estonia took a similar step with regard to stateless children born in the country after independence.

Moreover, one of the major aims of the international community in Estonia and Latvia was to minimise the potential for ethnic conflict. Today it can be stated that the perceived possibility of an outbreak of ethnic violence that existed in the early 1990's has been largely eliminated partly due to the impact of international preventive diplomacy, and the EU in particular.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Lykke Friis and Anna Murphy, “EU Governance and Central and Eastern Europe – Where are the Boundaries?”, *Occasional Paper in Human Capital and Mobility Network: The European Policy Process*, No. 35, 1997, (University of Essex, 1997), 13.

<sup>15</sup>For a comprehensive study of international involvement with the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia, see: Hanne-Margret Birckenbach, *Preventive Diplomacy Through Fact-Finding. How International Organizations Review The Conflict Over Citizenship In Estonia and Latvia* (Munster/Hamburg/ London: LIT Verlag, 1997).

<sup>16</sup>The abolition of the “window” system gave the opportunity to apply for naturalisation to all those interested irrespective of age. The change of the law became possible after the favourable outcome of the national referendum that took place on October 3, 1998. However, the referendum was passed with a minimum majority (53% in favour of the amendments, the rest - against, which implies that the outcome was achieved owing to the votes of the non-Latvians with citizenship who constitute 16% of the citizenry).

<sup>17</sup> As is often pointed out, one of the major driving force behind the adoption of the Latvian Citizenship law itself in 1994 after extensive political battles between 1991 and 1994, was the desire of Latvia for membership in the Council of Europe.

<sup>18</sup>Hanne-Margret Birckenbach, “North-Eastern Estonia: Why No Violent Conflict?”, *Paper presented at the Third Annual Convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN)*, Harriman Institute, Columbia University, New York, April 1998, 3.

These developments can only be evaluated positively.<sup>19</sup> However, they were achieved with great difficulty and over a long period of time. International pressure has been accompanied by reluctance of the Estonian and Latvian governments to yield to it, as the requirements they were expected to fulfil were considered excessive.<sup>20</sup> The conflicting values and interests of the different players in the citizenship dispute as well as the vague provisions of international law on the questions of nationality and minority rights did not allow for the speedy resolution of the problem. On the EU part, only mild pressure could be applied considering the historical complexity and legal peculiarity of the Estonian and Latvian situation and the varying practices of the EU member states in terms of minority and citizenship policies.<sup>21</sup> However, the authority that the EU has in the eyes of the local decision-makers has had a significant impact.

Thus, on the one hand, international efforts can be praised for having resulted in important changes to Estonian and Latvian citizenship legislation that initially seemed unachievable and, even more importantly, for having initiated a discussion of the conflicting interests of the different sides. On the other hand, however, international pressure did not bring immediate results allowing the uncertainty in the position of the Russian-speakers, especially stateless persons, to persist for years. This uncertainty has still not been overcome in spite of some legal improvements that have taken place since 1991 in the two Baltic states.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The degree of effectiveness of diplomatic pressure applied by the EU as well as by other international actors and the actual impact of this pressure upon the decision-making process requires a separate detailed analysis. A special study is necessary in order to establish the existence of a causal link between such pressure and the actions of the states.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Estonia, *Reply to Max van der Stoep, OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities*, Tallinn, June 4, 1997.

<sup>21</sup> For discussion of these issues, see, for example: Nicola Piper, *Racism, Nationalism and Citizenship. Ethnic Minorities in Britain and Germany* (Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate, 1998); Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration. Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (University of Warwick: Center for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1998); John Rex, *Ethnic Minorities in the Modern Nation State. Working Papers in the Theory of Multiculturalism and Political Integration* (University of Warwick: Center for Research in Ethnic Relations, 1996); Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (ed.), *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe. Racism, Identity and Community* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd., 1997).

<sup>22</sup> The status of Estonia's non-citizens was defined by the Law on Aliens adopted on July 8, 1993. Latvia's non-citizens remained in a legal vacuum until April 12, 1995 when "The Law on the Status of Former USSR Citizens who Have Neither Latvian nor Another State's Citizenship" came into force.



Although the regulations concerning the legal status of non-citizens and provisions regarding their identification documents are clearer today than they were a few years ago, the problems are far from being resolved in practical terms. Besides, the on-going attempts to restrict the laws on language and education cause frustration on the part of the Russian-speakers who feel threatened by the future developments in these areas, particularly as far as the prospect of transferring secondary education entirely into the Estonian or , Latvian languages, respectively, is concerned. As demonstrated by a variety of social surveys, the status of being a non-citizen is connected with feelings of insecurity and the so-called "alien's passport" is viewed as a discriminatory document.<sup>23</sup> In spite of the changes to the Citizenship Law, the number of stateless persons is likely to remain high for many years, particularly in Latvia, as the process was hardly taking place before the 1998 amendments to the Law on Citizenship. Presently, naturalisation requirements remain too demanding for many, the fee for naturalisation remains high (about 80% of the minimum salary) and the administrative procedure remains quite complicated and lengthy. Besides, the motivation of the Russian-speakers to naturalise has been undermined by the long years of exclusion producing negative attitudes towards the procedure as such.

These problem areas confirm the insufficiency of mere legislative adaptations for the creation of integrated democratic societies in the two countries and imply that the international involvement in Estonia and Latvia has not exhausted itself. Further promotion of democratic stability and the desire to avoid the segregation of the Estonian and Latvian societies primarily on the linguistic basis are the main reasons for the continuing EU involvement with integration issues and human rights in Estonia and Latvia. However, although foremost, these are not the only reasons for the EU's interference with the problems of the Russian-speaking minorities. Its geopolitical dimension will be examined in the next section.

<sup>23</sup>The 1998 "Towards a Civic Society" survey revealed that 73% of non-citizens in Latvia associate their status with the feeling of insecurity, 47% - with the feeling of humiliation, 67% - with discrimination at the labour market (Baltic Data House 1998, fig. 6, p. 26); 60% view the alien's passport as a discriminatory document. (Ibid., fig. 10, p. 28) In Estonia, 70% of non-citizens claimed that their status was associated with perceiving constant insecurity and was the underlying reason for the difficulties in finding a job. The alien's passport is viewed by 80% of non-Estonians as an insult. ("Non-Estonians are Dissatisfied With Aliens Passports", in: *The Open Estonia Foundation Research Project* (Tallinn: Open Estonia Foundation, 1997), available at: <http://www.oef.org.ee/integrenglish/four/html>)

## 2. THE SECURITY DIMENSION OF EU INTERFERENCE WITH MINORITY ISSUES IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA: THE CONCERN OVER RUSSIA'S BEHAVIOUR IN CASE OF ENLARGEMENT

Despite the quite similar problems faced by the Russian-speaking communities in Estonia and Latvia, Estonia was invited by the European Commission for its first round of accession negotiations, but Latvia was not. This fact provoked extensive debates, analyses and speculations as to the reasons for this decision. Estonia has definitely made greater progress as far as the pace of naturalisation is concerned. Over 100 000 people had been naturalised in Estonia by March 1998, while the figure for Latvia is just over 12 000.<sup>24</sup> Besides, the Opinion was released before the amendments to the Latvian Law on Citizenship were introduced; in fact, it greatly contributed to their adoption which again suggests that the EU conditionality policy is effective and should be continued. However, as the Commission's Opinion implies, Estonia is also far from having solved its problems with the Russian-speakers, particularly non-citizens. In general, the weaknesses highlighted by the Commission in both the Estonian and the Latvian case are very similar. Why then was Estonia selected for negotiations in 1997 in spite of the unsatisfactory situation with the Russian-speakers, and why was Latvia not selected?

One of the assumptions holds that the citizenship/naturalisation criterion was not the decisive one, and economic considerations played a greater role. The obvious conclusion drawn from this suggests that the EU has accepted the fact that large non-citizen communities will remain in the two countries for years to come, and that Latvia should first of all improve its economic performance in order to be invited, devoting secondary attention to the problem of the Russian-speakers. However, shortly after the Opinion was issued, the Accession Partnerships with Estonia and Latvia made it explicit that the facilitation of the naturalisation and the integration of non-citizens and stateless children are the top priorities.<sup>25</sup>

Rather than trying to explain why Estonia was invited for negotiations and Latvia was not, and in which way Estonia has performed better, it could be more appropriate to find an explanation as to why the EU has in fact selected

<sup>24</sup> Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Citizenship Statistics", *Estonia Today. Estonian Foreign Ministry's Fact Sheet*, March 19, 1998; Republic of Latvia State Naturalisation Board, *Naturalisation Process in Latvia 1995-1999* (Riga, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> The European Commission, Directorate General for External Relations: Europe and the New Independent States. Accession Partnership –Latvia.(1998); The European Commission, Directorate General for External Relations: Europe and the New Independent States. Accession Partnership –Estonia.(1998).



one of the Baltic states for the first round rather than leaving the whole Baltic region in the "pre-in" group. One of the assumptions might be that although none of the Baltic states has satisfied the necessary conditions, there was a principal necessity for the EU to include at least one of the Baltic countries in the first round of negotiations for geopolitical reasons.

It is obvious that the EU cannot ignore the implications of its enlargement for Estonia's and Latvia's relations with Russia, and citizenship and minority issues in the two Baltic countries are of major importance in this area. In the case of accession, the Eastern borders of Estonia and Latvia will constitute the EU-Russian border. Taking this into account, it becomes evident that the situation of the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia is of direct concern to the EU also for security reasons. As pointed out by Karen Smith, "the application of conditionality competes with other considerations of foreign policy, such as commercial and geopolitical/strategic interests".<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, it may be suggested that the inclusion of Estonia in the first round of negotiations was largely determined by geopolitical considerations. As has been argued, "the inclusion of a Baltic country was particularly important in sending a signal to the applicants and to Russia that this would not be just a central European enlargement".<sup>27</sup> Such a step implied that the Baltics belong to the "Western domain". A Latvian observer writes that "if at least one of the three Baltic states achieves EU membership in the first round of enlargement, that will be an accomplishment for the other two as well, because EU membership would put an end to the geopolitical problem which the Baltic states faced after the announcement of the first round of NATO expansion"<sup>28</sup> (when none of the Baltic states were included - J. D).

Undoubtedly, Russia's behaviour towards the Russian-speaking minorities in the two Baltic states is one of the main considerations that motivates the EU to continue its involvement with minority problems in Estonia and Latvia.

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<sup>26</sup> Karen Elizabeth Smith, "The Use of Political Conditionality in the EU's Relations with Third Countries: How Effective?", *EUI Working Paper SPS No. 98/7* (Florence: European University Institute, 1997), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Heather Grabbe and Kirsty Hughes, *Enlarging the EU Eastwards* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 114.

<sup>28</sup> Zaneta Ozolina, "Latvia and the European Union: Before and After Amsterdam", paper presented at the Steering Committee Meeting of the International Research Project "The Eastward Enlargement of the European Union: the Case of the Baltic States - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania", European University Institute, Florence, Italy, September 25, 1998, p. 11.

So far, Russian politicians have been attacking Estonia and Latvia quite harshly, accusing them of pursuing a policy involving human rights violations<sup>29</sup> with regard to the Russian-speakers residing there. Russian representatives have raised the issue of discrimination towards the Russian-speaking population at the level of international organisations such as the UN and the Council of Europe, thus trying to bring international attention to the existing problems.<sup>30</sup> These activities, as well as Russia's considerations about introducing economic sanctions against Estonia and Latvia and the unveiled nationalistic rhetoric of some Russian hard-liners, have aroused negative feelings in Estonia and Latvia where perceptions of a Russian threat are acute. Suspicions of Russia's determination to reinstate its influence in the Baltic region have become pronounced among Estonians and Latvians.

Such suspicions are present also in Western Europe. Due to its current economic and political instability, Russia is regarded as unpredictable and capable of collapsing back into authoritarianism. In spite of assurances of the Russian leaders that Russia would not abandon its democratic path, the international community does not seem to have confidence in its stable future. Although the EU has generally tried to be optimistic about Russia,<sup>31</sup> concerns over its possibly unfavourable behaviour have been voiced also in connection with EU enlargement. As one analyst notes, "If the Union of fifteen member states would be enlarged to central and east European countries and specifically in the case of enlargement to the Baltic states, the uncertainty with regard to Moscow's policy towards its near abroad might grow."<sup>32</sup> He goes on, quoting

<sup>29</sup>Thus, for example, on February 8, 1994, Russian Foreign Minister A. Kozyrev accused Estonia of "ethnic cleansing" and announced a plan "to protect the interests of ethnic Russians in the former Soviet republics".

<sup>30</sup>For instance, on October 15, 1997, several Russian and Ukrainian representatives to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe signed a Written Declaration in which Estonia and Latvia were accused of discriminating the Russian-speakers on the basis of ethnicity and language.<sup>30</sup> It was stressed that, "the denial *a priori* to grant citizenship to some sectors of the population violates the basic principles of international law - the presumption of innocence. This is nothing but "preventive discrimination" which in reality is a kind of political totalitarianism which the Council of Europe opposes". It was further stated that Russia "could not possibly tolerate" the existing situation and would "continue to protect the Russian and Russian-speaking population in Estonia and Latvia." An appeal to the Council of Europe "to take practical steps to improve the situation" was made. (Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, *Written Declaration no. 266, on the Situation of the Russian-Speaking Population in Latvia and Estonia*, Doc. 7951, October 15, 1997, par. 2, available at: <http://stars.coe.fr/doc97/edoc7951.htm>.)

<sup>31</sup>See: Commission of the European Communities. *The European Union and Russia: the Future Relationship* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the EC, 1995).

<sup>32</sup>Franco Algieri, "In Need of a Comprehensive Approach: the European Union and Possible External Security Challenges" in: Algieri, Franco, Josef Janning and Dirk Rumberg (ed),



the Federal Trust: "Irredentism, a thrust to regain hegemony, genuine difficulties over Russian minorities, are all potential tinder if political conditions in Moscow change".<sup>33</sup>

This concern becomes especially pronounced considering the fact that Russia is not likely to become an EU member state. Some analysts worry that Russia may perceive the EU enlargement to the Baltics as an attempt to recreate a divided Europe.<sup>34</sup> As pointed out by Grabbe and Hughes:

There is a danger that the non-applicants left outside the EU and NATO, such as Russia and Ukraine will feel threatened by the enlarged organizations on their doorsteps if their own prospects for joining are remote. (...) The question of relations with non-applicants is especially important where there are extensive economic linkages or populations of mixed ethnic origins (...) It is possible that the security aspects of EU enlargement could become more of an issue in Russian foreign policy.<sup>35</sup>

However, other observers suspect Russia of uncertain great power aspirations regardless of the prospect of enlargement. As stated by one author, in the case of non-enlargement, "[t]he whole central and east European region will remain a grey area in security terms open to attempts on the part of Russia to regain influence over that region."<sup>36</sup>

The Baltic states are seen as particularly vulnerable to Russian interference due to their borderline position between the "East" and the "West". Nello and Smith argue that,

Russia may seek to pressure the EU and the new member states, particularly the Baltic republics. Including one of the Baltic republics in the first wave of EU enlargement is seen as a way of including them all in the West's sphere of influence" (...). Estonia has been mentioned as the first possible EU member state of the three. But Estonia has had serious difficulties with Russia (over, among other things, its treatment of the Russian minority), and it is not clear how the EU would handle a deterioration in Russian-Estonian relations.<sup>37</sup>

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*Managing Security in Europe: the European Union and the Challenges of Enlargement* (Guetersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1996), 123.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Senior Nello and Karen E. Smith, "The Consequences of Eastern Enlargement of the European Union in Stages", EUI Working Paper RSC No. 97/51 (Florence: European University Institute, 1998), 47.

<sup>35</sup> Grabbe and Hughes, 114.

<sup>36</sup> Mathias Jopp, "Developing a European Security and Defense Identity: the Specific Input of Present and Future New Members", in: Algieri, Franco et al (eds.), *Managing Security in Europe...*(1996), 75.

<sup>37</sup> Nello and Smith, 48.

The current numbers of citizens of the Russian Federation in Estonia and Latvia add to the anxiety of the European observers. In Estonia, this number exceeds 120 000 people.<sup>38</sup> In Latvia, about 60 000 people have opted for Russian citizenship with half of them having moved to Russia.<sup>39</sup> As noted by the Reflection Group on the Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement,

In accepting Estonia and Latvia as future members, the EU will also have to shoulder the burden of this issue in its relations with Russia, which will continue to take an active interest in its citizens abroad and could well choose to extend its purview to the fate of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in general, even when EU citizens.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, Jopp argues that,

In the Baltics, the EU will have to cope with the problem related to a minority which largely belongs to an external power. Even though Russia seems in the meanwhile to have recognised that the Baltic states no longer belong to its direct "near abroad", Russian interference in the Baltic states' domestic affairs can never be excluded and also not the use of the minority issue for exercising pressure on these states.<sup>41</sup>

The author considers that in this situation, the EU must first of all "insist on the implementation of minority rights in the Baltics (...) in order to weaken any intentional arguments by the Russians" and, second, "to take a firm stance vis-à-vis Russia by making clear that there is no possibility of the Baltic states being again made to become part of any new Russian empire. This would ultimately require a firm WEU/EU commitment to protect the territorial integrity of these countries should they be threatened."<sup>42</sup>

The above-cited statements are expressed in a way that represents Russia as a potential source of danger to the overall security of the EU both in the event of EU enlargement to the Baltics and in the case of non-enlargement. A persisting preoccupation with the possible negative consequences of Russia's behaviour towards the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics reflects the caution in the authors' perceptions of Russia as well as their overall vision of

<sup>38</sup> Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site. *Citizenship Statistics*, available at: <http://www.vm.ee/eng/estoday/1998/03cits.html>.

<sup>39</sup> UNDP, 55.

<sup>40</sup> Giuliano Amato, "Minority Rights and EU Enlargement to the East". *Report of the First Meeting of the Reflection Group on the Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement: the Nature of the New Border*, Rapporteur: Judy Batt, Policy Papers, RSC No. 98/5 (Florence: European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre, 1998), 10.

<sup>41</sup> Jopp, 78.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



the international system in terms of opposing “spheres of influence.” However, a deeper insight into Russia’s position as well as into public attitudes in Russia and the Baltic states under study is needed in order to understand how well-founded the concern over the negative outcome of the complex relationship between Russia, Estonia/Latvia and the Russian-speaking minorities really is, particularly in the event that Estonia and Latvia become EU members.

### 3. THE BALTIC-RUSSIAN ANTAGONISM: THE DYNAMICS OF THE TENSION

#### 3.1. The triadic interplay

In order to understand the nature of the current tension involving the Russian-speaking minority between Estonia and Latvia on the one hand, and Russia on the other, it is important to briefly trace back its development and observe how it actually came about. It will then be possible to evaluate how potentially threatening Russia’s attempts to protect compatriots in these countries are.

Rogers Brubaker describes the relationship between the players involved in a “minority” conflict in terms of a triadic nexus where the “nationalizing state”, the “national minority” and the “external national homeland” interact with one another in various ways. He speaks of each of these entities (which by no means constitute coherent groups) as “fields of differentiated and competitive positions or stances” adopted by different organisations, parties, movements or individuals seeking to legitimately represent these entities both to the internal and external actors. Actors in each field seek to monitor actions and relations in the other two fields. This kind of monitoring involves selective attention, interpretation and representation of what is going on in the two other external fields which often leads to “representational struggles” within a given field.<sup>43</sup>

The stances that the various fields take are linked to perceptions and representations of developments in the external field(s). This is a complex relationship, as certain perceptions and representations may alter the existing stances or provoke new ones. Thus, commitments to stances emerge in response to perceived or represented developments in the external field. On the other hand, in the case when stances within the field are governing, they require a

<sup>43</sup>Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 61.

certain representation of an external field, even at the cost of deliberate misinterpretation.<sup>44</sup>

The nationalizing state may try to represent the national minority as potentially disloyal and the "homeland" as irredentist. On the other hand, attempts to mobilise the minority may be linked to efforts to represent the state as nationally oppressive. Generally, strong nationalist stances among some members of the interacting fields lead to the distortion of the images of the other "through both sincere selective perception and cynical misrepresentation." Simultaneously, those members of the field initially indifferent to nationalistic dispositions may come to adopt pronounced nationalistic stances in response to the (mis)representations of perceivably threatening developments in the other fields.<sup>45</sup>

This model also applies to the case of Estonia and Latvia where they represent the field of "nationalizing states", the Russian-speakers constitute the "national minority", and Russia stands as the "external homeland" (in spite of the fact that the majority of the Russian-speakers in the Baltics do not view it as such). The presently held stances of the three "fields" have crystallised gradually due to a number of developments.

In the periods shortly before, and right after, the restoration of independence in 1991, relations between the Baltic states and democratic Russia were friendly and co-operative, as both sides were united in their aspirations to do away with the Soviet centre.<sup>46</sup> Yeltsin recognised the independence of the Baltic states setting no conditions and asking no guarantees of Estonia and Latvia with respect to the Russian-speakers. This period has been referred to as "the initial triumph of the democratic vision of interstate relations" (when the Russian government was more or less indifferent to the developments in the former Soviet republics focusing primarily on its relations with the "West").<sup>47</sup> The nationalistic stance was not present in Russia's attitude towards the Baltics at that time. Soon, however, the friendly atmosphere was damaged by issues concerning the treatment of the Russian-speaking minorities

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>46</sup>Alexander Sergounin, "The Russia Dimension" in: Mouritzen, Hans (ed.) *Bordering Russia: Theory and prospects for the Baltic Rim* (Aldershot, Brookfield USA, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate, 1998), 26.

<sup>47</sup>Neil Melvin, *Forging the New Russian Nation: Russian Foreign Policy and the Russian-Speaking Communities in the Former USSR* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994), 44.



(1992-the present), the Russian troop withdrawal (1992-1994), and NATO enlargement (since 1995).<sup>48</sup>

The problem of the Russian-speakers may be considered the central one, as it has no quick solution and is always present in connection with the other issues. It is obvious that the Russian democratic government that came to power in 1991 did not expect the unfavourable developments that the Russian-speakers faced in Estonia and Latvia soon after independence was achieved. The denial of citizenship to the Russian-speakers not only made them feel "cheated" (as many of them - around 40%<sup>49</sup> - provided support for the Baltic independence in the late 80's to the early 90's), but also provoked dissatisfaction in Russia having become the reason for Russia's repeated diplomatic attacks on the Baltics, both justified and undertaken for broader political purposes. Sergounin explains that contrary to Moscow's expectations, the Baltic states "seemed not very obliged to Russia for liberation from the Soviet domination and subsequently did not hurry to express their gratitude".<sup>50</sup>

Further developments were largely determined by both Russia's and the Baltic states' quest for identity and place in the newly-emerged international system. The negative trend in the Baltic-Russian relations and the formation of confrontational stances on both sides is explained by both the domestic and the international political context. Thus, the initially nationalistically "indifferent" Russia chose to assume the role of a "homeland" with regard to its "compatriots".

The Baltic states adhered to the idea of re-establishing the "status quo ante" in terms of creating "classical" nation states that would closely resemble the ones existing during the inter-war period in spite of the virtual impossibility of achieving this aim due to the fundamental changes that occurred in the ethnic composition of these states. Hence the firm devotion of the Baltics to the nationalistic stance. At the same time, the Baltics chose to strive for close integration with Western political and security organisations, primarily the EU and NATO. In the meantime, Russian foreign policy concentrated on the post-Soviet space, and Russia's preferences with regard to the Baltics did not correspond to the preferences of the Baltic states themselves. Russian foreign policy makers preferred a neutral position for the Baltics while the Baltic states

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<sup>48</sup> Sergounin (1998), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Latvian Social Research Centre, in: Zepa, Brigita "Sabiedriskā doma pārejas periodā Latvijā: Latviešu un cittautiešu uzskatu dinamika (1989-1992)" [Social attitudes in transition: dynamics of the Latvians and non-Latvians' attitudes (1989-1992)], Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmijas vēstis A. daļa. 1992.g. Nr. 10(543), 22.

<sup>50</sup> Sergounin (1998), 28.

were striving for membership in Western alliances. While Russia desired to retain leadership in the Baltic region, the Baltic states were determined to distance themselves from Russia to the greatest extent possible, primarily in political terms.<sup>51</sup> Each side defined its interests in a way that did not imply reconciliation. Since all the actors involved were operating using realist foreign policy conceptions, the creation of enemy images was inevitable in both cases.

Russia's negative reaction to the mistreatment of Russian-speakers in the Baltics, namely, its tactics of condemning Estonian and Latvian ethnic policies in the international forum and especially linking the withdrawal of Soviet troops to the observance of the Russian-speakers' rights was interpreted in the Baltics as evidence of Russia's ambitions to mobilise this group and eventually use it for retaining influence in the region, in spite of the fact that much of Russia's rhetoric did not reflect the official position of the state. As one Latvian analyst writes, "the Baltic countries could do very little to stop Russia from using the ethnic Russians who reside in the Baltics as an excuse to meddle in the domestic affairs of the three countries and to increase its influence there".<sup>52</sup> At the same time, the existence of any discrimination of the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and Latvia was completely denied, but their loyalty towards their countries of residence continued to be questioned which is explicitly demonstrated by the lack of progress in the resolution of the citizenship problem that has lasted for many years.

The fact that Russia conditioned its troop withdrawal on the extension of citizenship to the Russian-speakers and observance of their human rights served as evidence to Estonia and Latvia of Russia's "imperial plans" with regard to the region and aggravated their stance towards the Russian-speakers. As pointed out by Jaeger, "negotiations with Russia actually inflated the enemy image of the Russian speaking population in Estonia and Latvia. (...) The Russian stance (...) caused apprehension to the Balts and fuelled the essentialist notion embedding political loyalty in ethnicity."<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Zaneta Ozolina, "Latvia" in Mouritzen, Hans (ed.) *Bordering Russia ...* (1998), 131, Olga Zhuryari "The Baltic Countries and Russia (1990-1993): Doomed to Good-Neighbourliness?" in: Joenniemi, Pertti and Juris Prikulis (eds.) *The Foreign Policies of the Baltic States: Basic Issues* (Riga: Centre for Baltic-Nordic History and Political Studies, 1994), 78; Aivars Stranga, "Baltic-Russian Relations: 1995-Beginning of 1997" in: Lejins, Atis and Zaneta Ozolina (eds.), *Small States in a Turbulent Environment: The Baltic Perspective* (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 1997), 185.

<sup>52</sup> Guntis Stammers, "The Ethnic Issue in Baltic-Russian Relations" in: Lejins, Atis and Daina Bleiere (eds.) *The Baltic States. Search for Security* (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 1996), 186.

<sup>53</sup> Ojvind Jaeger, *Securitising Russia: Discursive Practices of the Baltic States* (Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) Working Paper No. 10, 1997), 23.



Russia's inconsistent strong statements with regard to the Baltics were interpreted as threatening and were used to once again prove to the West that the Baltics need to become part of major Western security structures in order to be protected from Russia. Russian rhetoric, paradoxically, came in congruence with the firmly held Estonian and Latvian stance, and what Brubaker calls "selective representation" was extensively employed by the Balts. As Sergounin points out, "the Baltic states, incidentally, are very skilful in using Russia's blunders to present Moscow as being in the wrong in the conflict."<sup>54</sup>

The Russian military doctrine that envisaged the possibility of the use of force in the name of protecting Russian citizens abroad and the so-called "Karaganov doctrine" of the "near abroad" which outlined the implementation of the "post-imperialist" strategy in the region and achieving closer integration of the post-Soviet space<sup>55</sup> were viewed as harassment in the Baltic states and interpreted as applicable to the Baltics in particular. As Stammers suspects, "the Baltic countries could be threatened if Russia were to use military or other pressure to force its own resolution upon ethnic policy. (...) The possibility that Russia may turn to military force someday is evidenced by the delays in withdrawing the army from the Baltics in 1992 and 1993."<sup>56</sup>

With the war in Chechnya, the image of Russia as the enemy crystallised even more firmly. With increased frequency, today's Russia became associated with the former Soviet regime and discussions of the Baltic-Russian relations developed into what has been called the "discourse of danger"<sup>57</sup>.

Russian rhetoric concerning the protection of the Russian-speakers reached its peak in March-April 1998 after a demonstration of predominantly Russian-speaking pensioners was dispersed by the Latvian police in Riga. The use of force by the police was described by the Moscow mayor Luzhkov as a "flagrant violation of basic human rights". Economic pressure was proposed by the Russian government and its implementation was actually initiated. However, the pressure aroused dissatisfaction among Russian-speakers (whose interests they were, apparently supposed to serve). In Latvia, Russia's behaviour was interpreted as a "continuation of Soviet-style methods to bring back into line what Moscow perceives to be recalcitrant republics, [which] supports the view that Russia, far from pursuing a democratic and co-operative foreign policy with its neighbours, has adopted a revisionist zero-sum foreign policy that seeks

<sup>54</sup> Sergounin (1998), 25.

<sup>55</sup> Aivars Stranga, "Russia and the Security of the Baltic States: 1991-1996" in: Atis Lejins and Daina Bleiere (eds.) *The Baltic States...* (1996), 150.

<sup>56</sup> Stammers, 197.

<sup>57</sup> Jaeger, 21.

to intimidate and coerce in order to reassert a sphere of Russian influence over the space of the former Soviet Union, including the Baltics.”<sup>58</sup> It is obvious that the Russian-speaking population could not escape the projection of this perception upon itself.

As Sergounin describes it, “part of the Baltic elites and broad public transformed their negative attitudes towards the Soviet centre into anti-Russian sentiment. For them, Russia will be a source of eternal threat posed by Moscow’s historical inclination to expansion and imperialism. In turn, Moscow can not understand why the Balts do not trust it and why “democratic” Russia must be responsible for what the totalitarian regime did. In fact, [the] new enemy image was created by both sides”.<sup>59</sup>

Although both Russian and leading Baltic political scientists admit that, in fact, Russia poses no military threat to the Baltic states today and has very limited opportunities to influence Baltic policies,<sup>60</sup> perceptions of such a threat are strong. This is manifested, for example, in the Latvian National Security Concept which defines the main threat to Latvian security as coming “from the neighbouring countries in their efforts to retain the Baltic states within their political, economical and military influence”. It is also stated that “the external threat of Latvia can be related to efforts of neighbouring countries to destabilise internal situation in Latvia”. The “neighbouring countries” are also suspected of possible attempts to “interfere [in] Latvian internal affairs or to carry out aggressive acts”.<sup>61</sup> As Estonian researcher Mare Haab admits, “mistrust and suspicion towards Russia’s role in regional security arrangements cannot quickly nor easily fade in Estonia”.<sup>62</sup>

The most salient manifestation of threat perceptions among ethnic Estonians and Latvians is provided by social survey data. Thus, when asked by the Baltic Barometer III whether the Russian state represents a threat to peace and security of Estonia/Latvia, 81% of Estonians and 80% of Latvians replied “definitely” and “possibly”.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, 81% of Estonians and 73% of Latvians

<sup>58</sup> John Eichmanis, “Latvian-Russian Relations: Ominous Signs”, (May 30, 1998), essay available from the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lv/>

<sup>59</sup> Sergounin (1998), 28.

<sup>60</sup> Stranga (1996) 161, Sergounin (1998), 42, also discussed further.

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Security Concepts of all the three Baltic states, see: Ojvind Jaeger, *Securitising Russia ...* (1997).

<sup>62</sup> Mare Haab, “Estonia” in: Mouritzen, Hans (ed.) *Bordering Russia ...* (1998), 128.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Rose, “New Baltic Barometer III. A Survey Study”, *Studies in Public Policy*, No. 284 (Glasgow G1 1XH: University of Strathclyde, 1997), question 100, p.35 By contrast, 80% of the Estonian Russian-speakers and 79% of Latvian Russian-speakers do not perceive the Russian state as a threat to peace and security of Estonia and Latvia.



replied that hard-line nationalist politicians in Russia “definitely” and “possibly” represent a threat to peace and security of the respective countries.<sup>64</sup> As Stranga notes, the threat from Russia is imagined rather than real.<sup>65</sup>

As public sentiments are quite strong, both the Baltic and the Russian right-wing nationalists are able to manipulate them for gaining electoral support. The confrontation between Estonia/Latvia and Russia influences the position of the Russian-speakers who have become hostages to the domestic political struggle in their respective countries, as well as to the wider geopolitical games of all sides. This, to a large extent, aggravates the problems faced by the minority population as objective evaluation of their situation becomes rather problematic since adherence to the stances adopted by both sides leads to exaggerated representation of the events.

Thus, for example, the slow naturalisation pace in Latvia and the acquisition of Russian citizenship by many minority representatives in Estonia are interpreted by Estonians and Latvians in ways congruent with their firmly held stance. As Jaeger describes it:

“Many find the threshold for naturalization too cumbersome or too distant to be worth climbing. Instead, they opt for Russian citizenship, which is subsequently securitized by representatives of the majority as evidence of Russia’s evil schemes to once again subjugate the Baltic states by establishing and, when time is due, exploiting a ‘fifth column’ of Russian speaking minorities.(...) Tension in minority-majority relations is thus reproduced and continues to sour Estonia’s and Latvia’s interstate relations with Russia”.<sup>66</sup>

At the same time, in Russia “emotional attitudes to the Baltic problems sometimes have led to exaggeration of the significance of the Baltic issues and to a vision of the Baltic states as ‘a source of threat to Russia’ (statement of the Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev 19 January 1994).<sup>67</sup>

The dynamics of Estonian/Latvian relations with Russia with regard to the minority issue exemplify the interaction of fields in Brubaker’s triadic nexus. The developments in one of the fields contribute to the creation of particular stances in the other fields and to their subsequent strengthening by selective representation, and the other way around: the developments in the external fields are interpreted in accordance with the stances held within a given field. In this way, the behaviour of the nationalising states - Estonia and Latvia -

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., question 101.

<sup>65</sup> Stranga (1996), 161.

<sup>66</sup> Jaeger, 28.

<sup>67</sup> Sergounin (1998), 25.

amplifies the “homeland” stance on the part of Russia which, in turn, contributes to the creation of the more defensive stance taken by Estonia and Latvia. And so on.

The description above shows the “chain reaction” in the development of Estonian-Russian and Latvian-Russian relations through the use of the minority issue and allows us to grasp the current atmosphere now underlying these relations. It follows from the analysis that the influence of the two fields - particularly the “nationalising states” and the “homeland” - upon each other is rather significant. However, this analysis is insufficient for establishing whether this kind of confrontation will continue and lead to potentially dangerous action from the Russian side in the case of EU enlargement. In order to assess the situation more accurately, it is necessary to take a closer look at the international dimension of Russia’s foreign policy towards the Baltic states and, further, to analyse what impact (if any) Russia’s involvement has had upon the behaviour and attitudes of the minorities in Estonia and Latvia. This will be discussed in the sections below.

### **3.2. The international dimension of Russian involvement with minorities in Estonia and Latvia**

At the point when the Estonian and Latvian-Russian relations come to be viewed in the broader international context, another actor generally referred to as “the West” (which usually denotes Western Europe and the United States) enters the “triadic” equation which now becomes “quadratic” or perhaps even “pyramidal” as Western interference influences all of the actors involved. The West comes in as another field of differentiated stances (as the West in itself is a heterogeneous entity comprising different states and organisations), and thus the interaction of fields becomes much more complex.

As mentioned above, Russia’s involvement with the minorities in the Baltics is not only about its genuine concern for their rights, although this is the starting point. Nor is it only explained by internal political developments in Russia. It is also, and perhaps primarily, an issue of Russia’s self-definition and its still unclear status in the changing international system. The same can be said about Estonia and Latvia, which are both still reaffirming their state identity in the world. Thus, it is impossible to discuss the Russian-speaking minority issue in the narrow context of Estonian and Latvian bilateral relations with Russia. In this situation, the problems faced by the minorities acquire secondary importance as, irrespective of their actual situation, their existence is exploited by both sides in accordance with broader interests at the international level.



The role of the West in this equation is quite complex, as its behaviour largely determines the behaviour of both Russia towards the Baltic states and the Baltic states towards Russia as well as towards their Russian-speaking minorities. As described by one scholar, Russia's attitude towards the newly independent states of the former USSR, and the Baltic states in particular is conditioned "by its assessment of the overall security environment and where it stands in relation to the West in general (...)".<sup>68</sup> Aivars Stranga also admits that "Russia's relations with the Baltic states are to a great extent dependent on the level, content and tone of Moscow's relationship with the West".<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, the whole Russian policy towards the Baltic states, particularly the stance it has taken with respect to the Russian-speaking minorities, has to be viewed through the prism of its relations with the West (which inevitably includes NATO and the EU, and their member-states). The defensive position of Estonia and Latvia should also be viewed through the same prism.

When describing the developments of Russia's relations with the West, a number of observers (both Western and Russian) note that the West's treatment of Russia since 1991 has not been "fair", as it refused to recognise Russia's desired international status and downgraded the importance of its role in the world. As admitted by McGwire, "despite the rhetoric of partnership, the trend since 1991 has been away from recognising Russia's need for symbolic equality as a great power."<sup>70</sup> This has led to an outcome where "in Russia's perceptions of, and attitude towards, the West, a competitive pattern certainly prevails over a co-operative one..."<sup>71</sup> The overall Western stance has been interpreted in Russia as an attempt to isolate it from major international developments. Fears of a possible re-creation of division lines in Europe by enlarging NATO, first of all, are pronounced in Russia. As one of the leading Russian security scholars has expressed it,

(O)ne of the important reasons for Russia's fixation on the near abroad was that it was not treated fairly in Europe and in many areas of the world on global issues, starting with arms control. (...) Russia was perceived as a successor of the Soviet

<sup>68</sup>Michael McGwire, "Russia and Security in Europe", in: Dawisha, Karen (ed.) *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transitions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, London: M.E.Sharpe, 1996), 86.

<sup>69</sup> Aivars Stranga, "Baltic-Russian Relations: 1997" in: "The 1<sup>st</sup> Round Enlargements - Implications for Baltic Security", *Humanities and Social Science* No. 2(19)/3 (20) 98 (Riga: University of Latvia/Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 167.

<sup>70</sup>McGwire, 90

<sup>71</sup>Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia's Security Interaction with Europe in a Post-Cold War Setting", in: Clesse, Armand and Vitaly Zhurkin (eds.). *The Future Role of Russia in Europe and in the World* (Luxembourg Institute for European and International Studies, 1997), 179.

Union and treated as a defeated nation. The first phase of Russian foreign policy was complete subservience to the West which could not avoid to provoke very strong feelings of national humiliation and as a backlash the growth of nationalist feelings. If the West treats Russia in the future as an equal partner in European security, in the situation in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Far East, wherever, then there is a very great chance that Russian policy in the near abroad will be not aggressive, but benign and conducive to the role of international organisations and involvement of civilised nations in the resolution of those conflicts.<sup>72</sup>

Describing the on-going process of constructing Russian foreign policy, scholars almost exclusively discuss the feeling of national humiliation and deprivation experienced by the politically and economically weakened Russia,<sup>73</sup> about its painful search for a new identity under the changing world order<sup>74</sup> and its current drive to “prove something to the world”<sup>75</sup> by, among other things, exploiting the issue of the Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states. There also seems to be a consensus that at present, Russia’s need is more for psychological, symbolic security. However, the prospect of NATO expansion to the Baltics does not provide for such security and intensifies the feeling of political exclusion in Russia. Although many scholars admit that NATO is unlikely to enlarge to the Baltics,<sup>76</sup> joining the alliance remains a foreign policy priority for the Baltic countries and constitutes a leitmotif of their foreign relations discourse. The enlargement project is not abandoned by the West either, which continues to add to uncertainty and frustration in Russia.

Again, a chain reaction goes on: Russia voices its protests against NATO’s expansion to the Baltics, the Baltic states use this as proof of Russia’s attempts to include them in its “sphere of influence”, Russia’s interference with the rights of the Russian-speakers serves as evidence of the danger the Baltic states face and proof of the necessity to join Western security structures. As follows from

<sup>72</sup>A. Arbatov, “Determinants of the Future Role of Russia”, Conference Proceedings in: Clesse and Zhurkin (eds). *The Future Role of Russia...*(1997), 85-86.

<sup>73</sup> See for example: Nikolai Rudensky, “Russian Minorities in the Newly Independent States. An International Problem in the Domestic Context of Russia Today”, in: Szporluk, Roman (ed.) *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, (NY, London: M.E.Shape, 1994), 58.; also: S. Kortunov “‘Imperskoje’ i nacionalnoje v Rossijskom soznanii” [The “Imperial” and the National in Russian Consciousness], *Mezhdunarodnaja Zhiznj*, May 1998, available at:

[http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan\\_mfa/interlife/archive.html](http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan_mfa/interlife/archive.html)

<sup>74</sup>Sergei Blagovolin, “Poiski novogo mesta Rossii v menjajushchemsa mire”[Russia’s Search for a New Place in a Changing World], *Mezhdunarodnaja Zhiznj*, April 1998, available at: [http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan\\_mfa/interlife/archive.html](http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan_mfa/interlife/archive.html)

<sup>75</sup>Paul Goble, “Russian Culture and the Redefinition of Moscow’s Foreign Policy”, in: Clesse and Zhurkin (eds.) *The Future Role of Russia...*(1997), 15.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Haab, 122, Stranga (1996), 170, Hans Mouritzen, “The West Dimension” in: Mouritzen, Hans (ed.) *Bordering Russia ...*(1998), 88.



concerns voiced in the West (cited in section 2), the Baltic fears are projected to Western consciousness where suspicion with regard to Russia is still pronounced. Thus, a security conflict emerges between Russia and the Baltic states: both are involved in "securitising" themselves: the Baltics - from Russia by seeking alliance membership; Russia - from the potentially opposing alliance which it sees in the form of an enlarged NATO. The problem of this security dilemma is well described by McGwire who states: "We have still to accept that by unilaterally seeking to improve our own security we automatically reduce the security of others, meanwhile diminishing overall security by increasing the danger of conflict."<sup>77</sup>

Russia's "offence" at Western "mistrust" has resulted in frustration and attempts to reassert its role at least in the former Soviet space. This largely explains the occasional "great power" rhetoric of Russia directed at the Baltic states. However, this does not serve Russia's desired goal, but increases opposition to it in the Baltics. As V. Baranovsky admits, Russia is now absorbed in "attempts to get a worthy place in the emerging international system. For Moscow, this goal (undoubtedly of paramount importance) has completely overshadowed the task of building a friendly environment in East-Central Europe..."<sup>78</sup>

The West's overall treatment of Russia and Russia's painful response to it has to a large extent determined the main points of its foreign policy on which a consensus among Russian political groupings, schools of international relations and holders of different world views seems to have been reached. Among them, as mentioned by A. Sergounin as a result of his comprehensive study of the stances various schools of political thought take on the future role of Russia in the world, are the following:

- Russia should remain a major power with a major voice in the international community;
- Russia has special geopolitical, strategic, economic and humanitarian interests in the post-Soviet geopolitical space and should be recognised as an unchallenged leader in this area;
- NATO's eastward expansion is the most serious challenge facing Russia in Europe. Russian diplomacy should prevent NATO enlargement, or at least minimise its effects, by excluding the Baltic states from the list of potential members, delaying the process for

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<sup>77</sup>McCWire, 90.

<sup>78</sup>Baranovsky, 178.

several years, and concluding an agreement between Brussels and Moscow to guarantee the security of the latter.<sup>79</sup>

The fact that this kind of security thinking prevails in Russia can perhaps be explained by the inability of the security policy-makers in both Russia and the West to go beyond their competing Cold-war perceptions of international relations. Nevertheless, however critical one might be of these stances, they should be taken as the starting point when assessing the possible implications of enlargement of the major Western organisations, particularly the EU and NATO to include the Baltic countries for Russia's behaviour towards them. As the above analysis suggests, the Russian diplomatic pressure on Estonia and Latvia in the form of stressing the violations of the Russian-speakers' rights is more determined by broader international political considerations as well as the domestic factors in Russia, rather than by Russia's particular aspirations in Estonia and Latvia themselves. As pointed out by a number of analysts, these foreign policy stances are quite natural for Russia and in themselves represent no threat to security in Europe.<sup>80</sup> What does seem to pose such a threat is, as McGwire puts it, "mounting frustration at what Russia sees as Western bad faith..."<sup>81</sup>

This brings us back to the question: is concern about the possible deterioration of Estonia's and Latvia's relations with Russia in the case of EU enlargement well-founded? More specifically: how likely is Russia to continue emphasising the issue of discrimination of the Russian-speaking minorities in its relations with Estonia and Latvia if they become EU members? What particular measures can be expected from Russia for exercising pressure on these states? How will the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia respond to such pressure? In order to clarify these issues, it is necessary to assess the current relationship between Russia and the EU, Russia's position towards the EU enlargement, public attitudes in Russia towards the "Russian-speakers" problem in the Baltics, and the extent to which the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia identify with Russia.

<sup>79</sup>Alexander Sergounin, *Post-Communist Security Thinking in Russia: Changing Paradigms* (Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) Working Paper No. 4, 1997), 52.

<sup>80</sup>For example, Rudensky, 76, McGwire, 87, also V. Shustov, "Rossija i problemi bezopasnosti v Baltijskom regione" [Russia and Security Problems in the Baltic Region], *Mezhdunarodnaja Zhiznj*, December 1997, available at: [http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan\\_mfa/interlife/archive.html](http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan_mfa/interlife/archive.html), 1.

<sup>81</sup>McGwire, 88.



#### 4. POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF EU ENLARGEMENT FOR RUSSIA'S BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING MINORITIES IN ESTONIA AND LATVIA

Considering the complexity of the current still undefined "post Cold-war" state in which the international system finds itself, only vague predictions about future developments in any area of the world can be made. However, it is possible to foresee what consequences the EU's enlargement will have on the position of Russia with respect to the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia, however general such assumptions might be.

The great number of factors that might influence Russia's behaviour makes it hardly possible to take account of all of them in advance. A number of scenarios may be envisaged. The Russian position will depend on the policies Estonia and Latvia continue to apply towards the minorities, the domestic political processes in Russia, Russia's international position, its attitude towards the EU, whether NATO will expand to the Baltic states, whether the EU will assume a more pronounced military character, etc. However, it will also depend on such factors as the attitude of the Russian-speaking minorities towards Russia and public support in Russia itself for any kind of interference. The most credible scenario does not include the expansion of NATO to the Baltics, at least not in the foreseeable future. The analysis that follows will, therefore, concentrate on the implications of the enlargement of the EU, assuming that there will be no simultaneous enlargement of NATO.

Although the processes of EU and NATO enlargement are often discussed simultaneously they have fundamentally different implications for Russia's behaviour. If NATO is seen in Russia as a hostile military alliance, the EU is perceived as a powerful civil and economic partner with which Russia is interested in establishing close co-operation.<sup>82</sup> While opposing their entry into NATO, Russia supports the Baltic states' joining the EU.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, Latvian and Estonian analysts are careful about accepting Russia's positive attitude. Aivars Stranga does not believe in Russia's sincerely

<sup>82</sup>O. Ivanov and I. Pozdnyakov, "Novije vozmozhnosti Rossii v Evropejskom Sojuze" [Russia's New Opportunities in the European Union], *Mezhdunarodnaja Zhiznj*, March 1998, available at: [http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan\\_mfa/interlife/archive.html](http://www.diplomat.ru/russian/izdan_mfa/interlife/archive.html), 2; Horst Guenter Krenzler, "The Geostrategic and International Political Implications of EU Enlargement", *Report of the Second Meeting of the Working Group on the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union*, Rapporteur: Filippo Andreatta 98/2, *Policy Papers*, RSC No.98/2 (Florence: European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre, 1998), 10.

<sup>83</sup>Shustov, 2.



favourable position with regard to the Baltic states' joining of the EU. He believes this to be just a temporary phenomenon, as Russia has no formal reason for objections yet, since the EU cannot be viewed as an alliance which is opposed to Russia. His view is that "whatever Russia might say about Baltic membership in the EU, membership would not correspond to Russia's strategic goal of blocking any attempt by the Baltic countries to withdraw from Russia's economic and political sphere of influence".<sup>84</sup> The author is convinced that "Moscow continues to hope that Estonia, to say nothing of Latvia, will have a hard time achieving membership with so many non-citizens".<sup>85</sup> This opinion is shared by Estonian political scientists who accept the view of a German observer that "the strategic purpose of Russia in recent years has been to prevent the Baltic states from joining the European Union. All means have been used for this purpose, including slandering Estonia in international organisations."<sup>86</sup>

This might be a valid assumption, as there certainly are forces in Russia that have not given up the idea of viewing the Baltics as part of the post-Soviet space subject to "integration". Therefore, they would not like to see the Baltic states joining any powerful political and economic Western organisation as Russia would then face the danger of being isolated. As Stranga admits, "membership in the EU for Central and Eastern European countries would mean their true, deep and irreversible integration into the modern European economic and political system - even deeper integration than could ever be provided by NATO". He stresses that in this situation Russia could remain outside the broad integrated system, therefore the Russian Foreign Ministry sticks to the idea of preventing the EU enlargement.<sup>87</sup>

However, a number of arguments suggest that even if Russian opposition to EU enlargement is indeed in place, it is likely to fundamentally change as the enlargement draws closer and becomes ever more inevitable. During the "uncertain" pre-accession period some forces in Russia might still undertake attempts to delay the enlargement. However, once the enlargement becomes a fact, a radical revision of relations with Estonia and Latvia is likely to take place, contrary to the suspicions referred to in the earlier sections that relations

<sup>84</sup> Stranga (1996), 155, Stranga (1998), 156.

<sup>85</sup> Stranga (1998), 162.

<sup>86</sup> Bernd Nielsen-Stokkebye, "Eine Politik der Verleumdungen: Rußland sucht die Einbindung der baltischen Staaten in die europäische Gemeinschaft zu erschweren".- *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Feb. 18, 1997, quoted in: Enn Haabsaar, Aksel Kirch "Influence of Russia on the Integration of Russians in Estonia: Historical Retrospection and Current Trends" in: Kirch, Aksel (ed.), *Integration of Non-Estonians into Estonian Society: History, Problems and Trends* (Tallinn, 1997), 87.

<sup>87</sup> Stranga (1998), 156.

will deteriorate should Estonia and Latvia become EU members. Already now, after the 1997 invitation for accession negotiations, Russia has eased its criticism of Estonia (viewing it as the most likely candidate for accession) and has concentrated its attention on Latvia (which has a lesser chance of being admitted).<sup>88</sup>

The benefits Russia has gained so far from partnership with the EU and the ones it is likely to enjoy should Baltic membership in the EU become a reality, do not imply that Russia will start strongly objecting to the enlargement “when time is due”. Stranga is concerned that Russia will take a confrontational stance should the EU start resembling a military block similar to NATO through the development of the CFSP and the increased role of the WEU. However, it would be a rather short-sighted policy on the EU’s part to choose to oppose Russia. Today, the Union remains a “‘security community’ in which the use of force or the threat of using force as mechanisms for regulating inter-state interaction are obsolete”.<sup>89</sup> In its present form, the EU is perceived favourably in Russia.

In fact, opinions in Russia even favour Russia’s entry into the EU (65%), however distant such a prospect might appear.<sup>90</sup> Readiness to join the EU was also expressed at the official level in Russia. Therefore, establishing closer ties with the EU is in the interests of both Russia and the Baltic states, suggesting that the EU’s enlargement would bring the countries closer together. It would provide common ground for dialogue, and is, therefore, more likely to result in the improvement of their bilateral relations than in their deterioration.

The suspected influence that Russia is trying to reinstate in the Baltics is generally feared by Estonia and Latvia in the form of definite measures that Russia could take towards them in the name of coercing them to ease the policies with respect to the Russian-speakers (such as, for example, economic sanctions). The Baltic states repeatedly express their concern about perceived infringement by Russia upon their sovereignty and, as has been shown earlier, do not rule out even Russian military intervention at the perceptive level. However, the likelihood of such actions from the Russian side does not appear very high and its probability appears even lower in the context of the EU

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>89</sup> Dr. Angel Vinas, Director of the Multilateral Relations Department of the European Commission, cited in: Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia/Latvian Institute of International Affairs, “Building an Inclusive Society for Europe... (1998), 30.

<sup>90</sup> Richard Rose and Christian Haerpfer, “New Russia Barometer III: The Results”, *Studies in Public Policy*, No. 228 (Glasgow G1 1XH: University of Strathclyde, 1994), question 63.



enlargement into Estonia and Latvia. As admitted by Russian experts themselves, Russia has hardly any tools for influencing Baltic policies:

The problem of national minorities has damaged Russian-Baltic relations, delayed Russian troop withdrawal and destabilised the whole regional system in international relations. What steps could be taken by Russia to improve the human rights situation in the Baltic states when it has limited resources to influence the Baltic states in this regard? The use of force is ruled out. Russia has only diplomatic and economic instruments at its disposal as a last resort to prevent discrimination against Russians there.<sup>91</sup>

As far as **economic pressure** is concerned, evidence suggests that its application would be rather harmful first of all for Russia itself, particularly if Estonia and Latvia become EU members. Russia is fervently seeking to expand co-operation with the EU, particularly in the economic sphere. The EU is Russia's biggest economic partner, accounting for around 40% of Russia's external trade turnover. It is also the largest investor in Russia's economy, providing 40% of all foreign investment into Russia. Besides, EU assistance to Russia in the framework of the TACIS programme is immense, making the EU also the largest Russia's financial benefactor. The Partnership and Co-operation Agreement between the EU and Russia which entered into force in December, 1997 provides for the overall favourable conditions for Russia in trade relations with the EU. The EU, for example, has lifted all quotas on the import of Russian goods and granted Russia 'most favoured nation' treatment in the field of export and import taxation.<sup>92</sup>

Therefore, it would not be appropriate for Russia to compromise its economic ties with EU members. Besides, the events of March-April 1998, when Russia actually attempted to apply economic pressure on Latvia in response to the dispersion by the Latvian police of a demonstration by predominantly Russian-speaking pensioners', have shown that such measures prove unprofitable for Russia itself, as the transit of Russian oil through alternative routes bypassing the Latvian ports is connected with considerable extra expenses.

Besides, economic pressure provoked mixed reactions among the Russian-speakers in Latvia who were directly affected by it, especially the ones involved in businesses largely dependent on co-operation with Russia. Thus, occasional Russian warnings concerning the possibility of applying economic measures to Estonia and Latvia appear to represent mere "sabre rattling" rather than to imply

<sup>91</sup> Sergounin (1998), 42.

<sup>92</sup> Ivanov and Pozdnyakov, 3.



dangerous action. As admitted by V. Baranovsky, so far, the “overall assertiveness of Russia (...) manifested with respect to the Baltic States (...) is almost exclusively declarative in character.”<sup>93</sup>

There is evidence that membership of the Baltic states in the EU is regarded in Russia with growing enthusiasm. Politicians and experts close to Russia’s foreign policy-makers admit that it is in Russia’s interest to have a stable and economically-developed country providing new markets and trade opportunities next to its border. Zaneta Ozolina refers to the member of Russia’s President’s Advisory Board on Foreign Affairs Andrei Karaganov who commented that prosperity on Russia’s borders means prosperity for the country. Latvia would thus be a gateway to the EU for Russia, especially taking into account the highly developed transportation system in Latvia which is widely used by Russia for its transit to Europe. There is a popular idea of creating a “tenth multimodal transport corridor” through Latvia for the transportation of goods from the West to the East and in the other direction.<sup>94</sup>

The positive implications of the EU’s enlargement to the Baltic states are also examined by Dmitri Trenin, Deputy Director of the Moscow Carnegie Centre. He mentions the following points:

- *Opportunities for profitable capital investment.* As soon as the Baltics join the EU, capital from Russia will flow there. Those will be investments in the infrastructures (ports, etc.) that serve the transit ways between Russia and the West.
- *Establishment of a privileged relationship with the EU.* The author stresses the importance of the role of the Russian speaking population in the economies of Latvia and Estonia. Through the Russian-speaking businessmen, Russia will “step with one foot into the EU.”
- *Stimulation of co-operation at the regional level.* Trenin foresees that under the impact of the EU, the Russian northwest with St. Petersburg as its centre will have a chance for accelerated development. Instead of the division line or a military stronghold currently represented by the northwest, it will transform into a broad thoroughfare of close contact with Europe:

“Closer co-operation with Estonia and, through her, with the West will provide opportunities to improve the economic situation in the area west of the Leningrad region. The Kaliningrad, Pskov, and Novgorod regions, which play the same role of

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<sup>93</sup> Baranovsky, 177.

<sup>94</sup> Ozolina (1998), 152.

transit territories as the Baltic states, will be in a position to prosper as a result of the creation of east-west transport corridors (for instance St. Petersburg - Tallinn - Riga - Kaunas - Warsaw; Riga- Kaliningrad - Gdansk) and the establishment of transborder Euro-regions and common links with the former Baltic Rim. In the long run, such a development will lead to the practical expansion of integrated Europe, this time within Russia's borders".<sup>95</sup>

The projection of this positive thinking will depend on the good will of all sides and their ability of give up the confrontational mentality. Presently it seems probable that while the EU enlargement into the Baltic states is still in progress, Russian rhetoric concerning minorities, as well as diplomatic pressure, might continue if discrimination against the Russian-speakers goes on; however, it is improbable for Russia to go beyond diplomatic means with respect to Estonia and Latvia as EU member states. Thus, with the enlargement, deliberate Russian pressure is more likely to soften, rather than become more assertive.

As to the **minority issue** itself, the current EU policy of applying diplomatic pressure on Estonia and Latvia has so far led to positive outcomes, primarily to the change of citizenship legislation. If it continues to succeed, the issue of citizenship will gradually cease to be as sensitive as it is presently. Although all of the problems facing the minorities are not likely to disappear (issues of language usage, education, equality at the labour market, etc. will remain on the agenda for many years to come), the settlement of at least the problem of statelessness will leave nationalistic forces in Russia with fewer issues to be exploited for domestic purposes. Besides, the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia are even more enthusiastic about their countries' membership of the EU than are the Estonians/Latvians themselves.<sup>96</sup>

This is also noted by Trenin who considers that the Baltic states' membership in the EU will promote the integration of the Russian-speaking population. Since the Russian-speakers comprise a sizeable share in the capitals and main port cities of the Baltics, closer relations between Russia and the EU will imply real economic assistance to the Russian-speaking residents. Hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians will quickly be integrated into the

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<sup>95</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Baltic Chance. The Baltic States, Russia and the West in the Emerging Greater Europe* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace/Carnegie Moscow Center, 1997), 36-37.

<sup>96</sup> 78% of Russian-speakers in Estonia favour the country's accession to the EU as compared to 59% of Estonians; in Latvia, the respective figures are 66% and 52%. Richard Rose, "New Baltic Barometer III..." (1997), question 135, p.44.



new inter-ethnic communities of the Baltic countries. The Baltic Sea coasts will see the new 'Euro-Russians'.<sup>97</sup>

EU membership will increase the value of Latvian citizenship through which EU citizenship will become acquirable. This will provide incentives for non-citizens to take a more active interest in naturalisation. The same is true for the Latvian language that, in the case of accession, will become one of the official languages of the EU. Thus, those having a poor command of this language will have more incentive to improve it.<sup>98</sup> All this implies that provocative gestures from the Russian side that could place the Russian-speakers in a confrontation with the EU are not likely to be welcomed by the minorities. Undoubtedly, Estonia and Latvia have a major role to play in the development of events as the policies they adopt with regard to the Russian-speakers will be the major determinants of future public attitudes in the two countries, as well as determining relations with Russia.

As to the fear of Russian **military intervention** in the Baltics, the majority of observers argue that this is a complete misperception. Russian sources unanimously state that Russia has no territorial aspirations whatsoever in the Baltic region. Russia's opposition to the Baltic states' joining of NATO does not imply that Russia would again like to subjugate them, particularly through the use of the Russian-speaking minorities. Russia sees the EU as the optimal guarantor of stability and security in the Baltic region and is determined to co-operate with the EU on Baltic security issues.<sup>99</sup> Russia favours the Baltic states' non-alignment with any military blocks that might be regarded as a risk to Russia's national security, but it does not follow that the sovereignty or territorial integrity of the Baltic states is threatened by Russia because of that. It does not seem logical, therefore, that Russia would attempt any aggressive action in the Baltics, let alone if they become EU members.

As McGwire concludes after a study of Russia's imperial history: "The historical record does not support the belief that Russia is inherently expansionist; there is no reason to suppose that it has an urge to add to its existing territories."<sup>100</sup> He also states that "while there are many calls to restore Russia's 'greatness', the political drive to reconstitute the Soviet Union or the

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<sup>97</sup> Trenin, 36.

<sup>98</sup> Juris Kanels, former Latvian Ambassador to the EU, cited in: Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia/Latvian Institute of International Affairs, "Building an Inclusive Society for Europe...(1998), 32

<sup>99</sup> Shustov, 3.

<sup>100</sup> McGwire, 86.



tsarist empire is absent, as is the military capability to do so."<sup>101</sup> Kortunov and Shustov emphasise the fact that the Russian army has been completely withdrawn from the Baltic states, which is the most salient manifestation of the non-existence of any aggressive plans on the Russian part with regard to the Baltics.<sup>102</sup> Rudensky also stresses that the "patriotic propaganda effort intended to use the plight of minorities to trigger violent nationalistic outbursts in Russia has (...) evoked only limited response among the population at large."<sup>103</sup>

This view is supported by **social survey** data which reflect that the Russians in Russia give very low priority to the problems connected with the Russian-speaking minorities outside Russia, and in the Baltic states in particular. It is the political elite that repeatedly stresses the issue. As is often the case in transitional societies, governments unable to offer effective economic solutions in a crisis environment, resort to nationalistic argumentation for attracting the electorate. However, it appears that the Russian population is not very likely to be receptive to any irredentist calls Russian nationalists may voice and would hardly be prepared to fight for the Russians in the Baltics.

Thus, when asked to set priorities among their main concerns, only 4% mentioned the treatment of Russians in other republics. Similarly, only 6% indicated "Russia's place in the world today" as their main concern. By comparison, issues such as rising prices, increasing crime, low wages, governmental ineffectiveness, and ecological pollution were given much higher priority (69%, 51%, 50%, 35% and 15% respectively).<sup>104</sup> Besides, when asked to state whether the Russian government should put making Russia a world superpower first or concentrate primarily on the domestic issues, 89% expressed their preference for the latter leaving only 11% preoccupied with the superpower status of Russia.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, those polled gave the lowest priority to the Baltic states when asked to specify with which former USSR republics Russia should have a close union. Only 40% mentioned Latvia and 39% Estonia. In comparison, closer ties with Belarus were favoured by 89% of the respondents, Ukraine by 87%, Moldova by 64%, Kazakhstan by 74%.<sup>106</sup> Finally, in their assessment of the

<sup>101</sup>Ibid, 84.

<sup>102</sup>Kortunov, 5, Shustov, 2.

<sup>103</sup>Rudensky, 75.

<sup>104</sup>Rose and Haerper, "New Russia Barometer III...(1995) question 24, p. 22. Note: three options could be chosen.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., question 26, p.24.

<sup>106</sup>Richard Rose, "New Russia Barometer IV: Survey Results", *Studies in Public Policy*, No. 250 (Glasgow G1 1XH: University of Strathclyde, 1995), question 59.

measures Russia could take if Russians in the near abroad were threatened, the majority of 96% supported negotiations, 67% approved of economic pressure, 66% of resettling Russian nationals in Russia, and only a minority of 17% supported taking military action.<sup>107</sup>

As to the minorities themselves, they can hardly be regarded as Russian irredenta or “fifth column”, since, as surveys show, their identification with Russia is not very strong: their identities and loyalties lie largely with Estonia and Latvia. As R. Rose points out: “even if the Kremlin and Members of Parliament think of Russians in the Baltic states as “their” people, it does not follow that Russian-speakers in the Baltics feel a similar nearness.”<sup>108</sup>

In fact, the majority of Russian-speakers in Latvia (56%) consider Latvian Russians to be a different people from the Russians in Russia. Only 30% see them as one single people, with the rest undecided.<sup>109</sup> Various surveys show that the overwhelming majority consider Estonia/Latvia their homeland, only a small fraction identifying primarily with Russia in this respect (predominantly the older generation that spent many years living in Russia). Evidence of the Russian-speakers’ loyalty towards Estonia and Latvia is presented by their strong interest in acquiring local citizenship as well as their views on civic duties that all residents owe to the state in which they live. The Baltic Barometer III survey revealed that over 90% of the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia consider it their duty to obey all the country’s laws, respect the nation’s flag and learn the official language, 77% in Estonia and 83% in Latvia consider it a duty to pay taxes on all their income and, what is striking considering that non-citizens are not entitled to serve in the army, 74% of Estonia’s Russian-speakers and 78% of those in Latvia consider military service one of the basic duties everyone in the country should perform.<sup>110</sup>

Furthermore, the majority of the Russian-speakers in Latvia do not support Latvia joining the Commonwealth of Independent States and believe that Latvia will never become part of Russia again.<sup>111</sup> Similarly, in Estonia, only 22% of the Russian-speakers think that Russia might use military force in the future against Estonia claiming to protect the residing there non-Estonians, with 69%

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., figure 7, p.49.

<sup>108</sup>Richard Rose, “Baltic Trends: Studies in Co-operation, Conflict, Rights and Obligations”, *Studies in Public Policy*, No. 288 (Glasgow G1 1XH: University of Strathclyde, 1997), 31.

<sup>109</sup>Baltic Data House, figure 134, p.126.

<sup>110</sup>Rose, “New Baltic Barometer III...”(1997), questions 115-119, pp. 38-39.

<sup>111</sup>Baltic Data House, figure 45-46, p.63.



believing that it will not happen.<sup>112</sup> In the event of an armed conflict with Russia, only 5% of Latvia's non-citizens said they would side with Russia, 51% remaining neutral, 24% siding with Latvia and the rest undecided. Among citizens-Russians the figure of those prepared to side with Latvia was higher (36%), but of those siding with Russia it was lower (2%)<sup>113</sup> which confirms the significance of citizenship status for the formation of the individuals' civic consciousness.

Another piece of evidence that does not support the "fifth column" perception of the Russian-speaking minorities is the fact that there have been practically no claims for any kind of territorial autonomy for the Russians within the Baltic states. In the Estonian city of Narva with the highest concentration of the Russian-speaking population, opinions that it should be granted a special autonomous status were strongest in 1992 (with 50% of the respondents supporting such an option), but later weakened. In 1993, there was even a referendum on autonomy which, although successful, was declared unconstitutional. Nevertheless, in 1996, 80% of the Narvans considered that Narva should remain a regular city in Estonia and only 17% favoured autonomy or some other kind of special status for the city. Notably, only 1% supported its incorporation into the Russian Federation.<sup>114</sup>

The number of citizens of the Russian Federation in Estonia and Latvia, is not likely to grow. As shown by the Baltic Barometer II survey, over 95% of the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia do not plan to acquire Russian citizenship. It may, therefore, be concluded that whoever was interested in taking Russian citizenship has already done so and, in the event if Russia tries to legitimately interfere in the domestic affairs of Estonia and Latvia in the name of protecting the interests of its citizens, it will have only limited opportunities for doing so.

Besides, the Russian-speakers are not a politically cohesive block. They hold different political views and do not necessarily all identify with a single "Russian-oriented" political organisation. When asked by the Baltic Barometer III whether they feel close to any political party or movement, only 10% of

<sup>112</sup>"Attitudes Toward Russia: the Biggest Divide in the Estonians' and Non-Estonians' Mentality" in: *Open Estonia Foundation Research Project* (Tallinn: Open Estonia Foundation, 1997), available at: <http://www.oef.org.ee/integrenglish/seven/html>

<sup>113</sup>Baltic Data House, figure 44, p.62.

<sup>114</sup>Sergei Gorohhov, "Integration in Practice: the Case of Narva", in: Kirch, Aksel (ed.), *Integration of Non-Estonians into Estonian Society...* (1997), 128. Note: combined results of the surveys conducted in 1990, 1992 and 1996.



Estonian Russian-speakers and 27% of the Latvian ones replied positively (figures almost identical with those for Estonians and Latvians).

Most of the Russian-speakers with political affiliation in Latvia (35%) identified with the Democratic Party "Saimnieks" (a party with a centrist orientation and mostly comprised of Latvians), 21% indicated the Party of People's Concord (an opposition party advocating the granting of citizenship to non-citizens, facilitation of naturalisation and integration of Russian-speakers into Latvian society) and only 13% claimed affiliation to the Latvian Socialist Party (a leftist political organisation fervently advocating the rights of non-citizens. This party is most often associated in Latvia with the "former communists").<sup>115</sup> The survey of Latvian inhabitants "Towards a Civic Society" conducted more recently than the Baltic Barometer III revealed an even greater split in the political views of non-citizens in Latvia. When asked for which party they would vote if they had the right to, the majority (47.2%) expressed uncertainty. "Equal rights" (an opposition movement generally supporting the view that systematic human rights violations take place in Latvia) was mentioned by 12.5% of the respondents, "Saimnieks" by 8.3%, the Party of People's Concord by 7.3%, and the Socialist Party by 2.1%, with the rest of the opinions split among other parties.<sup>116</sup>

In Estonia, the Baltic Barometer III survey showed a greater coherence of political views. However, only half of Estonia's Russian-speakers identified with the Russian Party of Estonia, 19% with the Estonian Centre party and 8% with the Estonian United People's Party. Certainly, political affiliation is not permanent and may often change. Language, education and labour policies advocated by the "Latvian" and "Estonian" parties will very much determine whether these parties will enjoy further support from the Russian-speakers.

Generally, the above facts suggest that even if there were attempts on the part of Russia to somehow mobilise the Russian-speaking minorities for projecting its political goals in connection with its role in the world, they would be unlikely to gain support in Estonia in Latvia among the minorities themselves. Besides, the public in Russia does not appear to manifest its deep concern for the problems of the Russian-speakers in the Baltics, nor enthusiasm for taking assertive measures in their interests. It is the strict Estonian and Latvian ethnic policies that might consolidate the Russian-speakers in the two countries and create an opposing block, but not the calls from Russia. However, the political will of the Baltic states to join the EU will hopefully prevent them from further tightening the citizenship, language, education and labour policy.

<sup>115</sup>Rose, "New Baltic Barometer III..." (1997), question 133, pp. 42-43.

<sup>116</sup>Baltic Data House, figure 59, p.76.

Thus, the evidence analysed in this section generally leads to the conclusion that in the case of EU expansion to Estonia and Latvia, the bilateral relations of these countries with Russia are more likely to improve rather than worsen (as suggested by a number of authors), as a deliberate exacerbation of relations with Estonia and Latvia as EU member states would largely go against Russia's interests, as well as against the interests of the Russian-speaking minorities in the two countries. As the above analysis suggests, there is a growing understanding of this in Russia. Although Russia's behaviour will depend on a whole set of factors, the most realistic assessment of developments does not imply a serious deterioration of Baltic-Russian relations, particularly if these relations are seen as EU-Russian relations. Therefore, concern over the possibility of a negative development of events involving the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia should be assessed more realistically in Europe and should not be exaggerated.

## CONCLUSION

Analysing why the EU actively conditions the membership of Estonia and Latvia upon the successful integration of the Russian-speaking minorities into Estonian and Latvian societies, it becomes evident that the primary concerns of the Union are those of improving the democratic arrangements in the two Baltic countries, minimising conflict potential and avoiding further segregation of their societies. However, judging from the concerns sometimes raised in the West with regard to the way Russia might behave towards Estonia and Latvia in the future, namely, if those countries become EU member states, it appears that the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia are still perceived as a security problem with international implications.

The classic triangle of "nation state" / "national minority" / "external homeland" in which the relations among the three actors often lead to conflict, is present also the case of Estonia/Latvia, their Russian-speakers and Russia. However, as evidence shows, in this case the triangle is largely non-conflictual. The enlargement of the major international organisations - the EU and NATO is still in progress, and the outcome of this process is not evident for Russia. Uncertainty with regard to its security and the overall symbolic international status, largely explains Russia's use of the issue of the Russian-speaking minorities to apply pressure on Estonia and Latvia thus far .

Undoubtedly, the current Russian stance with regard to Estonia and Latvia worries the Baltic states as well as raising concerns in Europe. However, as noted by a number of experts, such Russian assertiveness is mostly declarative



and is unlikely to result in a serious deterioration of its bilateral relations with Estonia and Latvia or in the destabilisation of security in the Baltic region. Besides, among Russian-speaking minorities, perceptions of the potential of being exploited in Russia's self-interest should the circumstances bring about such a scenario, is often overestimated by outside observers. As has been demonstrated, the Russian-speakers in Estonia and Latvia hardly constitute classic irredentist communities, as they only weakly identify with Russia and their sense of belonging as well as their loyalties and political affiliations are associated with their homelands, i.e. Estonia and Latvia.

Considering Russia's overall positive attitude towards the EU and the importance it attaches to economic co-operation with the EU, as well as to co-operation in the field of international politics and security, the perception that it would deliberately seek to exacerbate difficulties in relations with Estonia and Latvia as EU members seems unfounded. Besides, with the entry of Estonia and Latvia into the EU, the cause of the problem - that is, the discriminatory treatment of the Russian-speaking minorities by the Estonian and Latvian governments is likely to become less pronounced.

The facilitation of the naturalisation procedure in Latvia and the granting of citizenship to stateless children born in Estonia and Latvia after independence has been achieved partly owing to the EU interference. It can be hoped, therefore, that the EU will remain as influential an international actor as it is at present, and that membership of Estonia and Latvia in the EU will contribute positively to the integration processes in their societies. As Dr. Angel Vinas points out: "the countries and people that have not long ago recovered their own sovereignty after years of Soviet occupation or domination will find out that membership of the Union will liberate them from the remaining shackles of their own past "thus allowing them to experience the "external and liberating effects of EU membership".<sup>117</sup> As noted by professor Rasma Karklina, the desire to join the EU is a unifying factor in the Latvian society that cuts across the lines of ethnicity, citizenship and other cleavages.<sup>118</sup>

The foreign and security policy of the Baltic states is presently shaped predominantly in realist terms. The international system is perceived in terms of opposing spheres of influence, competing national interests, power balance and so on. The same is true about the foreign and security policy of Russia. Thus, a security conflict has emerged between the Baltic states and Russia over the

<sup>117</sup> Vinas, cited in: Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia/Latvian Institute of International Affairs, "Building an Inclusive Society for Europe...(1998), 31.

<sup>118</sup> Rasma Karklina, cited in: Delegation of the European Commission in Latvia/Latvian Institute of International Affairs, "Building an Inclusive Society for Europe...(1998), 33.

issue of which international actor would best provide for the security of the Baltic region. Baltic and Russian views differ on this issue, and the Russian-speaking communities of Estonia and Latvia are perfect vehicles for both sides to advocate their points-of-view.

However, with the enlargement of the EU into the Baltic states, the perceptions of the international world order may change both in Russia and in the Baltics under the influence of, among other things, the foreign and security policy agenda of the EU which is taking shape in less pronounced "power politics" terms and in which positivism prevails over the "negativism" now dominating the Baltic and the Russian security agendas.<sup>119</sup> As A. Sergounin points out, speaking about Russia, the current predominance of realist/geopolitical concepts in Russia's foreign and security policy is due to the fact that the country still finds itself in the process of nation-building and searching for a national identity.<sup>120</sup> The Baltic states, where statehood is still in its early stage, are faced with similar challenges. In fact, this is also true about the domestic politics of the Baltic states and Russia.

However, the entry of the Baltic States into the European Union may gradually influence the security agenda of Estonia and Latvia, as well as of Russia. Once again quoting Sergounin:

"a completely different set of priorities could be the focus of future security debates: ensuring domestic stability and territorial integrity, preventing the rise of hostile powers and alliances may be replaced by concerns such as the environment, mass disease, international terrorism and narcobusiness, migration, the increasing vulnerability of economic and information networks, and so on."<sup>121</sup>

In this case, the importance now attached to the issue of the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia for the overall security of the region is likely to diminish. However, the attitude of the EU towards Russia, and the rhetoric coming from Western Europe in general, will significantly condition the shifts in both the Baltic and the Russian security mentalities.

Jekaterina Dorodnova

<sup>119</sup>See, for example: Reinhard Rummel, "CFSP's Strategic Areas of Innovation: Instruments and Contents" and Fraser Cameron, "The Future of the CFSP: Measures for Improvements", in: Algieri, Franco et al (eds.). *Managing Security in Europe...* (1996).

<sup>120</sup>Sergounin (1997), 52.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 53.



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